

Article 19

Constant barking - is it protection or attention?

Dear Gus.

I am writing about my dog, Browney the Barker. Browney is a 2-year old purebred standard dachshund. Browney barks at anything and anyone! And she doesn't stop until they are off the property. Browney barks at squirrels, crows, joggers, other dogs with walkers, stray dogs and anything in between.

It is particularly annoying when there is company over, or someone has come to work on something in the house. You can't even carry on a conversation. She is so LOUD the house across the street and up a hill with everything shut can hear her loud and clear even though everything is shut in our house, too.

She will not obey any commands when she is barking at other people in the house. We have tried picking her up, having the company give her treats, petting her, talking to her. Nothing works! Please Help.

Sincerely,

The Cooper Family, Orange

The Cooper Family,

Browney probably has two issues that are making this problem seem more difficult to solve than it really is. However, this is a fairly common problem, and is generally easily resolved. Browney most likely has territorial issues combined with attention seeking behavior. The root cause of these two issues is probably a poor understanding by both Browney and your family of the dog pack structure. Browney thinks that she is "in charge" of the family and home, and that it is her job to protect her territory and her family. This is a dog is very much trying to control family and her environment, which is not unusual in the small canine world. It's not only humans that have a 'Napoleon complex'!

Browney doesn't bark just to hear herself bark. Remember when your Mom said—"I'm not speaking just to hear the sound my own voice". Likewise Browney begins barking for a reason: to scare away a perceived threat, be it a guest, another dog, or a lawnmower. But she has also learned continue the barking as an attention getting device. Because, after all, the Browney barks, the more treats and petting and attention she gets!

You need to change the situation at home so that Browney realizes that she is not in charge, but that the family is. I first thing that you must do is to break the cycle of barking, so that Browney can 'hear' your commands. Right now she so focused on her job of scaring away bad guys that she doesn't even 'hear' your commands to stop. To do this, you need to get Browney's attention off the object she is barking at, and then can introduce a new stimulus—yourself as the leader.

Begin this re-training on leash outside. When Brownie barks, give her a slight correction and firm NO until she gets the message that this is not desired behavior. If the correction and "No" aren't effective, you may need to startle her, for example, by shaking a can with pennies in it, to distract

her from the object of her barking. Immediately when she stops barking, praise her or give her a favorite treat, to reinforce the corrected behavior of not barking. You will be breaking Bowney's fixated thought process, and introducing correct behavior. Next start working in the house. Have Browney on her leash before guest arrive, and instruct them to completely ignore Browney, including any barking. As with outdoors, when she begins to bark, correct and distract her, and immediately upon stopping barking, praise her and give her affection.

In a very short time, you and your neighbors will be able to keep you windows open again!

Gus.

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